

**Listing of Claims:**

20. (Amended) A [diluent for bacterial stain] reagent for staining bacteria comprising:

(a) a staining solution containing a dye;

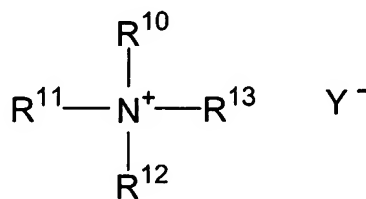
(b) a diluent containing a buffer for maintaining acidity[;] and

an effective amount of a substance capable of reducing nitrite ions.

21. (Amended) [A diluent] The reagent for staining bacteria according to claim 20, wherein the substance capable of reducing nitrite ions is selected from the group consisting of: ascorbic acid, isoascorbic acid, aminomethanesulfonic acid, aminoethanesulfonic acid, glutamic acid, aspartic acid, mercaptoacetic acid, 3-mercaptopropionic acid, sulfamic acid, sulfanilic acid, sulfurous acid, pyrosulfurous acid, phosphinic acid, glycine, glutamine, asparagine, methionine, glutathione, cysteine, hydroxylamine and salts thereof; sulfanilamide; aminomethane; mercaptoethanol; thiophenol and urea.

22. (Amended) [A diluent] The reagent for staining bacteria according to claim 20 further comprising a cationic surfactant.

23. (Amended) [A diluent] The reagent for staining bacteria according to claim 22,



wherein the cationic surfactant is a quaternary ammonium salt represented by the following formula:

wherein R<sup>10</sup> is a C<sub>6-18</sub> alkyl group or (C<sub>6</sub>H<sub>5</sub>)-CH<sub>2</sub>-; R<sup>11</sup>, R<sup>12</sup> and R<sup>13</sup>, the same or different, are a C<sub>1-3</sub> alkyl group or a benzyl group; Y<sup>-</sup> is a halogen ion.

24. (Amended) [A diluent] The reagent for staining bacteria according to claim 20, wherein the buffer has a pKa of 1 to 5.5.

25. (Amended) [A diluent] The reagent for staining bacteria according to claim 20, wherein the buffer is used to maintain a pH of 2.0-3.0.

26. (Amended) [A diluent] The reagent for staining bacteria according to claim 23, wherein the cationic surfactant is at least one selected from the group consisting of decyl trimethyl ammonium salt, dodecyl trimethyl ammonium salt, tetradecyl trimethyl ammonium salt, hexadecyl trimethyl ammonium salt and octadecyl trimethyl ammonium salt.

Please add the following new claims:

—27. The reagent for staining bacteria of claim 20 wherein the dye is a fluorescent dye.

28. The reagent for staining bacteria of claim 20 where in the dye is a polymethine dye.—.